

Montana Commission on Community Service
AmeriCorps National Service
Request For Proposal (RFP)
Year 2006 Guidance



- ❖ Thank you for your interest in the AmeriCorps National Service grant program. This packet contains the information you requested pertaining to the application process for 2006/07 AmeriCorps grants through the Montana Commission on Community Service. Additional application information is included in the 2006 AmeriCorps State NOFO and Application Instructions.
- ❖ Eligible grantees include nonprofit organizations in compliance with IRS Section 501(c)(3) regulations; schools; institutions of higher education; state agencies; subdivisions of the state including cities, counties, and municipalities; Indian Tribes; or a partnership or collaboration of any of the above entities.
- ❖ Technical assistance is available to all prospective applicants from October 17, 2005-December 1, 2005. Please contact the Montana Commission on Community Service (MCCS) at 406/444-9077.
- ❖ Grant applications are due by 4:30 p.m. December 16th, 2005 at the Montana Commission office (1 unbound original, 4 copies and one electronic copy on computer disk.) Applications submitted by mail must be received on that date, not postmarked by that date. Faxes will not be accepted. The Commission's address is P.O. Box 200801, Helena, Montana 59620.
- ❖ Funding for 2006/07 AmeriCorps National Service grants is subject to Congressional appropriations. **For additional information, contact Will Soller at the Montana Commission on Community Service at 406/444-9077 or wsoller@mt.gov**

The Montana Commission on Community Service seeks to renew the ethic of civic responsibility in Montana by encouraging all citizens to engage in full or part-time service to the state. Established in 1993, the Commission is a state agency funded primarily by the Corporation for National Service.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

AmeriCorps is a community service program that provides full and part-time opportunities for participants, called members, to serve their communities through community organizations and agencies. AmeriCorps programs strive to meet real community needs in the areas of education, the environment, public safety, other human needs, and most recently homeland security. AmeriCorps is locally driven and community based, with a specific mission to: Get Things Done, Strengthen Communities, Encourage Responsibility, and Expand Opportunity. During their term of service, most AmeriCorps members receive a living allowance; full-time members are eligible for health care and childcare if needed. Members who successfully complete a term of service receive an Educational Award.

AmeriCorps*USA is one of many National Service programs funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency created under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Under this same legislation, states were required to establish community service commissions to provide a coordinated response to National Service programming in the state. Prior to the Act, the Montana Legislature approved the Governor's Advisory Council on Community Service, now the Montana Commission on Community Service, as a statutory agency in 1993.

One of the roles of the Commission is to select programs to be included in Montana's annual application submitted to the Corporation for National Service and to oversee the implementation and operation of programs funded through the Corporation. Example of types of programs include:

- Programs that recruit, train, and support college volunteers to serve elementary school students in after school tutoring programs;

- College-based programs in which student Americorps members perform service in local schools or community settings;
- Programs where members respond to disasters, and provide community disaster/emergency preparedness education to individuals, families, and faith or small community-based organizations;
- Faith-based programs that provide literacy and ESL training for low-income adults, reading improvement for homeless elementary age children, or teach and model social skills to children;

Funding and Grants Process

The Corporation for National Service and the Montana Commission make operating grants available to support organizations that are ready to establish new AmeriCorps programs or to support, expand, or replicate existing AmeriCorps programs.

The Montana Commission expects an equivalent amount of funding available as last grant cycle. The Commission will review and select program proposals that will be sent on to the Corporation to compete at the national level for program funding. The following timeline will be followed:

10/17/05-12/1/05	Technical assistance call window open for prospective applicants.
12/16/05	Grant applications due by 4:30pm at MT Commission office.
January '06	Applications reviewed and rated by peer committee.
February '06	Successful proposals sent to the Corporation to compete nationally.
Summer, '06	Official notification of grant awards.
August '06	Final awards issued, programs begin.

eGrants. In addition to a paper submission, the Commission will require all applications to be submitted online on an electronic system called eGrants. This will take place after the Commission has conducted its peer review process and made decisions on which projects it wishes to submit for national competition. For more information, please contact Will Soller at 406/444-9077.

National Service Programs

Depending on program objectives and design, AmeriCorps State and National programs are not the only service opportunities available in Montana. Others include:

AmeriCorps*VISTA. Volunteers In Service To America have been working to develop the capacity of low-income communities and help residents become more self-sufficient for more than 30 years. Assigned to community-based organizations, VISTA members strengthen communities by increasing the capability of people to improve the conditions of their own lives through employment training, literacy programs, housing assistance, health education, and neighborhood revitalization. For more information, contact John Allen at the

Corporation for National Service State Office at 406/449-5404.

Learn and Serve America. Through small grants, Learn and Serve America promotes service-learning activities in K-12 schools across the state, helping educators link the academic learning of young people to an ethic of community service. Contact June Atkins at the Office of Public Instruction at 406/444-3664.

National Senior Service Corps. Seniors are making a difference throughout the state as Foster Grandparents who serve children in schools and other institutions, as Senior Companions who provide assistance and friendship to other seniors who have difficulty with daily living tasks, and as Retired and Senior Volunteers - the largest volunteer effort in the nation - helping to solve local problems. Contact John Allen at the Corporation for National Service State Office at 406/449-5404.

To learn more about all of the national service programs supported by the Corporation for National Service, check out the website at: www.nationalservice.org.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

AmeriCorps Goals

"Getting things done" in communities. AmeriCorps programs must meet educational, public safety, human, and environmental needs in the community served, by providing direct and demonstrable benefits valued by the community. Service activities must result in a specific, identifiable service or improvement that otherwise would not be provided with existing funds or volunteers, and that does not duplicate the routine functions of workers or displace paid employees.

Strengthening communities. Programs must strengthen communities, bringing together both institutions and individuals to cooperate in effecting lasting and constructive change. This strengthening of communities is evidenced by community involvement in planning and implementation, the development of local partnerships, and the recruitment of volunteers. Added emphasis will be

placed on programs that demonstrate partnerships with faith or small community-based organizations, defined as less than 10 employees and with an annual budget of less than \$500,000.

Developing AmeriCorps members. Programs must help members develop, through their service experience, the ethic and skills needed for productive, active citizenship. During the term of service, most AmeriCorps members receive a basic stipend; full-time members are eligible for health care and possibly childcare benefits. At the end of the term of service, an education award of up to \$4,725 is awarded that can be used for many kinds of education, or to pay back student loans. Programs must also provide members with the training and knowledge necessary to perform the task required in their respective projects.

National Priorities

Issue areas. According to CFR 2522.450, the Corporation will seek to ensure that its portfolio of approved programs includes a meaningful representation of proposals that address one or more of the following priorities:

(a) Program models: (1) Programs operated by community organizations, including faith-based organizations, or programs that support the efforts of community organizations, including faith-based organizations, to solve local problems;

(2) Lower-cost professional corps programs

(b) Program activities: (1) Programs that serve or involve children and youth, including mentoring of disadvantaged youth and children of prisoners;

(2) Programs that address educational needs, including those that carry out literacy and tutoring activities generally, and those that focus on reading for children in the third grade or younger;

(3) Programs that focus on homeland security activities that support and promote public safety, public health, and preparedness for any emergency, natural or man-made (this includes programs that help to plan, equip, train, and practice the response capabilities of many different response units ready to mobilize without warning for any emergency);

(4) Programs that address issues relating to the environment;

(5) Programs that support independent living for seniors or individuals with disabilities;

(6) Programs that increase service and service-learning on higher education campuses in partnership with their surrounding communities;

(7) Programs that foster opportunities for Americans born in the post-World War II baby boom to serve and volunteer in their communities; and

(8) Programs that involve community-development by finding and using local resources, and the capacities, skills, and assets of lower-income people and their community, to rejuvenate their local economy, strengthen public and private investments in the community, and help rebuild civil society.

(c) Programs supporting distressed communities: Programs or projects that will be conducted in:

(1) A community designated as an empowerment zone or redevelopment area, targeted for special economic incentives, or otherwise identifiable as having high concentrations of low-income people;

(2) An area that is environmentally distressed, as demonstrated by Federal and State data;

(3) An area adversely affected by Federal actions related to managing Federal lands that result in significant regional job losses and economic dislocation;

(4) An area adversely affected by reductions in defense spending or the closure or realignment of military installation;

(5) An area that has an unemployment rate greater than the national average unemployment for the most recent 12 months for which State or Federal data are available;

(6) A rural community, as demonstrated by Federal and State data; or

(7) A severely economically distressed community, as demonstrated by Federal and State data.

(d) Other programs: Programs that meet any additional priorities as the Corporation determines and disseminates in advance of the selection process.

2006 Focus Areas: For the FY 2006 competition, the Corporation will also give special consideration to four additional strategic focus areas that meet critical needs of our nation. The Corporation's draft strategic plan considers extending these focus areas with five-year priorities. These focus areas are defined broadly to build upon the existing work of State Commissions, territories, national non-profits, institutions of higher education, Indian Tribes, and local communities. They are:

1. Ensure a brighter future for all of America's youth: Children and youth who grow up in severely distressed communities are more likely to be at risk of school failure, unemployment, criminal behavior, and persistent poverty. Among other interventions, AmeriCorps programs often bring positive change to the lives of these children and youth in one or both of two ways: engaging them in service and connecting them with caring adults such as mentors or tutors. AmeriCorps looks to build on this success in its 2006 program year.

2. Harness experience to meet 21st century challenges: Baby Boomers are a highly educated, highly motivated group that could drive solutions to some of our most intractable social problems. Capturing their talents and experience, and engaging

them in helping to solve critical social issues through service must become a high-priority goal for the nation in the coming years. Several AmeriCorps programs have achieved strong success in this area in the past, and in 2006, AmeriCorps is interested in finding some additional models to support.

3. Build the supply line for “America’s Armies of Compassion:” In 2004, more than 64 million Americans served their communities as unstipended volunteers with organizations. AmeriCorps programs provide more support than any other program to volunteer generating nonprofits. In addition, all Corporation programs provide unique support to volunteer connector organizations in communities. In 2006, AmeriCorps plans to build on this success through generating even higher levels of volunteering through its grantees and through supporting programs that build or strengthen volunteering infrastructure in communities.

4. Students in the community – building engaged citizens: Educational institutions (elementary, secondary, and higher education) are charged with the responsibility of educating students to become responsible citizens and leaders who use their education and life experiences to support the common good. Volunteering and service-learning are important factors in this educational experience and need to be incorporated on a more widespread basis. AmeriCorps is looking to expand its impact in generating service learning in the K-12 environment and to generate more students in higher education institutions serving needs in their community.

Local Priorities

Commission Education Award Only Priority. In 2006, the Commission has identified programs that use education award only members (members without stipends) as a funding priority, as a strategy to reduce the Commission’s overall statewide cost-per-member.

Generating volunteers. The Commission requires all programs to place an emphasis on involving other community members as volunteers to assist them in service activities. Programs are required to have one performance measure specifically related to managing and recruiting volunteers. Programs are especially encouraged to find ways to involve

children and youth in service as volunteers. This does not mean, however, that a program's sole purpose must be to recruit and supervise volunteers.

Program focus and service ethic. The Commission believes that it is important for all programs to impart the service ethic to their members. Accordingly, the Commission will not fund any programs that have as a major purpose job training rather than service.

Diversity. The Commission encourages all programs to develop a specific strategy for attracting members with diverse backgrounds.

Program Design

Applicants have a great deal of flexibility to design programs that will best achieve the goals listed above. This flexibility includes the ability to target individuals of a certain age or skill level as members; to involve appropriate partner organizations to train, supervise, or support members; and to place members individually in projects or organize them in teams. Programs may also determine whether a full-time or part-time schedule is more appropriate to the program's goals. The Commission has the following programmatic requirements:

Evaluation. All programs that apply for funds through the Commission are required to plan and implement an evaluation of their program at least once every three-year grant cycle. The evaluation must cover a minimum of one year, but may cover longer periods. Programs with an annual budget over \$500,000 are required to arrange an independent evaluation, while programs under \$500,000 must budget for and conduct an internal evaluation.

Commission Evaluation. From September 2005 to August 2005, the Commission sponsored a year-long effort to develop evaluation tools to document and capture the community impact of AmeriCorps programming in Montana. The Commission plans to implement and support this effort sometime in 2006. Programs will be required to take part in this effort.

Performance Measures. Programs that apply to the Montana Commission are required to complete and report on performance measurements as outlined in

the 2006 Montana State Commission Performance Measure Requirements for Sub-Grantees.

Size. Programs must be large enough to achieve a demonstrable impact. Accordingly, the Commission requires a minimum of 12 full-time members. Programs that solely use education award only members (members without stipends) are required to have a minimum of 20 MSY.

In addition, experience has shown that programs with service activities at fewer sites involving groups of members rather than individually placed members have a greater impact on the community. The Commission's experience with AmeriCorps programs in Montana has demonstrated that coalition-style organizational structures are a way to place AmeriCorps members in scattered sites but multiply their impact through a central office and unified objectives.

AmeriCorps is not designed for programs that may be looking for one or two placements to work on a particular project. Those interested in only one or two AmeriCorps members for direct service activities may also want to consider partnering with existing or similar organizations and applying for more members as a coalition.

Direct vs. Indirect Activities. While changes developed over the course of the recent CNCS rulemaking process have expanded the role of indirect or capacity-building activities as appropriate for AmeriCorps programs, the Montana Commission requires that at least 50% of a program's member activities (as a total program aggregate) must focus on direct-service activities.

Fundraising. An Americorps member may spend no more than 10% of his or her time performing fundraising activities, as outlined in CFR 2520.45-45.

It should be emphasized that overall program quality will be the most important criterion for selection by the Montana Commission on Community Service.

"Everybody can be great because anybody can serve" – Martin Luther King, Jr.

AmeriCorps Members

TERM OF SERVICE

Programs may engage members on a full-time or part-time basis. Full-time members must serve at least 1,700 hours during a period of between nine and twelve months. Part-time members must serve at least 900 hours. Reduced part-time terms are an option for programs; please contact the Commission for more information.

BENEFITS

Living allowance. All AmeriCorps programs must provide a living allowance for full-time members (see below). Programs are not required to provide living allowances to part-time members, but, if they do so, it must be a prorated version of the full-time allowance.

Education awards. AmeriCorps members will receive an education award from the National Service Trust upon completion of their term of service. Full-time members will receive an award of \$4,725, and half-time members will receive \$2,362.50.

Health care. In general, grantees must provide full-time members with a health care policy through the Corporation for National Service, or with an equivalent policy arranged by the program.

Child care. Full-time members meeting state or federal income guidelines will be eligible for child care assistance.

Budget Requirements

All programs that receive Commission support for AmeriCorps activities are required to comply with the following budget and grant requirements:

Program support costs. Requested funds may not exceed 67 percent of the program's total costs. The grantee's share of these costs is 33 percent and may be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions. Member costs, such as living allowances and benefits, are not considered program costs for the purpose of this calculation as they have separate matching requirements.

In addition to the basic matching requirements, programs must provide an overall level of matching funding. The grantee share of program costs based on a predictable and incremental schedule must increase to a 50 percent overall level by the 10th year in which an organization receives an AmeriCorps operational grant for the same program. Programs that cannot meet these requirements and that are located in rural or severely economically distressed areas may apply for permission to meet an alternative match requirement which would increase the grantee share of program costs to a 35 percent overall level by the 10th year. Please consult CFR 2521.40 for match schedule.

Based on experience, the Commission recommends that a full-time staff member (or the equivalent) be allocated to serve as program director. Also, given the emphasis on results, the Commission expects that each program will devote resources to a thorough internal evaluation of progress toward objectives.

Unemployment Insurance. Although The US Department of Labor ruled on April 20th, 1995 that federal unemployment compensation law does not require coverage for members because no employer-employee relationship exists, states are free to come to their own determination regarding the employment status of AmeriCorps members. At this point in time the State of Montana has determined that an employment relationship does exist; therefore, program applicants are required to budget unemployment insurance coverage.

Member support costs. Requested funds for member support costs cannot exceed 85 percent of the minimum required living allowance and health

care costs. Grantees are required to match 15 percent of these costs in the form of non-federal cash. The minimum fiscal year 2006 for a full-time member living allowance is \$10,900, the maximum \$21,800, both figures considering all sources of funding. Again, the maximum requested member support cost cannot exceed 85 percent of the minimum, or \$9,265.

Member Training. In the grant review process, the commission places an added value on programs that budget adequate funds for and clearly outline member training in their proposal.

Cost per MSY. Cost per member is arrived at by dividing the total Commission funding request by the number of Member Service Year (MSY) AmeriCorps members in the program (e.g., 10 part-time members equal five full-time). The Commission is committed to reducing its overall average cost per AmeriCorps member. **The 2006 cost per MSY cap is \$12,600.**

However, programs that use only education award only members (members without stipends) are required to maintain a lower cost per MSY. **For 2006, the cost per MSY cap for those programs is \$2,000, with a minimum requirement of 20 MSY.**

Institutional capacity. AmeriCorps is a demanding grant, subject to a number of federal regulations. In addition to the challenges of reporting, member management, evaluation, and the expectations of program sustainability over time, AmeriCorps programs must also have the financial and administrative capacity to match and manage the grant within the fiscal constraints dictated by the Office of Management and Budget.